



***Laus Terrae*: Praising the Homeland in the Oldest Central European Historiographic Monuments**

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Abstract

The term *laus terrae* (praise of the land) refers to a very positive description of the homeland which appears frequently at the beginning of medieval historiographic works. The paper analyzes the composition of such texts in the oldest known extensive Polish, Czech, and Hungarian chronicles. The three works in question give very similar descriptions of the homeland, which is presented as a wealthy land abounding in various natural resources, whose qualities are also underlined in a similar manner. The existence of those analogies is not surprising as the authors of those works were clearly influenced by the same literary motifs. Their choice to present the homeland as a *locus amoenus* (pleasant place) was of course related to their intention to emphasize the position of the country whose past they related as well as the power of the current and previous rulers of this territory.

Keywords: *laus terrae*; Poland; Bohemia; Hungary; Middle Ages; historiography; homeland

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Introduction

The practice of inserting descriptions of idealized landscapes in medieval texts is a well known phenomenon. In his great work *Europäische Literatur und lateinisches Mittelalter*, Ernst Robert Curtius devotes a whole chapter to this question (Curtius, 1948, pp. 189–205): the German scholar shows that the motif of ideal landscape appeared already in Homer (Curtius, 1948, pp. 191–192) and evolved in the Roman Imperial period to form the topos of the *locus amoenus* (Curtius, 1948, pp. 195–200). The motif of the *locus amoenus* (pleasant place) was also extremely popular in the Middle Ages. Curtius states it was a *Requisit* for the lexicographers, such as Isidore of Seville (Curtius, 1948, p. 197), and masters of stylistic composition of that period (Curtius, 1948, p. 202). From 1070, it became a frequent topic in medieval Latin poetry (Curtius, 1948, p. 202), but also in dialectical philosophical works. Although during the period of Antiquity the motif of the *locus amoenus* was usually associated with small elements of the landscape, such as a grove (Curtius, 1948, pp. 199–200), in the twelfth century it began to refer to the earthly Paradise or to larger areas, such as the legendary island of Thule (Curtius, 1948, p. 203).

The creation of idealized representations of the landscape is also a frequent practice in medieval historiography, especially in the genre of the *gesta*. In their introduction to the Latin-English edition of the *Chronicae et Gesta ducum sive principum Polonorum* (Chronicles and Deeds of the Dukes or Princes of the Poles) of the so-called *Gallus Anonymus*, Paul Wendel Knoll and Frank Schaer describe the medieval *gesta* as texts which “concentrate on the (usually martial) deeds of the rulers and present the history of a region” (*Gesta principum Polonorum*, 2003, p. xxxiii) and add that “they often include in their initial chapters a description in the form of a *laus terrae*, or praise of the land” (*Gesta principum Polonorum*, 2003, p. xxxiii). As can be seen from the translation, the term *laus terrae* refers to a very positive description of the homeland which appears frequently at the beginning of medieval historiographic works.

In the case of medieval Central Europe, “praises of the land” appear not only in the already mentioned work of *Gallus Anonymus*, which was written between 1112 and 1116 and is thus the oldest preserved historiographic monument concerning Poland, but also in the *Gesta Hungarorum* (The Deeds of the Hungarians) of the anonymous notary (“Anonymi Bele regis notarii *Gesta Hungarorum*”, 2010), which were probably written between 1196 and 1203 by a former clerk of the Hungarian king Béla III (“Anonymi Bele regis notarii *Gesta Hungarorum*”, 2010, pp. xix–xxii; Szilágyi, 1938/1999, pp. 631–634) and are the oldest preserved extensive historical narration for this country.¹ Moreover, a *laus terrae* can also

1 Hungary’s oldest known historiographic work is probably the *Annales Posonienses* (Annals of Bratislava), which appear to be slightly older than the work of the anonymous notary (Madzsar, 1937/1999, pp. 119–127). The existence of older, lost *Gesta Hungarorum* is accepted by all scholars, but the date of their first redaction is disputed (Bagi, 2007, pp. 105–127; Deér, 1937/1999, pp. 3–11).

be found in the *Chronica Boemorum* (Chronicle of the Czechs; Cosmas Pragensis, 2020), which was written before 1125 by Cosmas of Prague, dean of St. Vitus' cathedral, and is the oldest known historiographic work for Bohemia. Although the praises of the land in the three oldest Central European historiographic monuments have already been studied by scholars, they were usually examined individually. In order to propose a broader perspective of this question, the present paper analyzes the composition of those texts adopting a comparative approach. For the sake of clarity, we will analyze each description separately according to the chronological order of redaction of the three works, before presenting the results thus obtained in a conclusive synthesis.

Laus Terrae in the Prologue of the First Book of the Chronicle of the So-Called *Gallus Anonymus*

Written in the second decade of the twelfth century, the chronicle of the so-called *Gallus Anonymus* is the oldest of the three works we will analyze in this paper. This chronicle is composed of three books written chiefly in rhymed prose, although the anonymous author also inserted some poems. The first book relates the history of the Polish rulers from the legendary origins of the Piast dynasty until the birth of Bolesław III the Wrymouth (1086), and the other two describe the deeds of this ruler, who is the main protagonist of the work, until 1113. All three books of the chronicle begin with a dedicatory letter and opening poems, and the first book is the only one which contains also a prologue (*Gesta principum Polonorum*, 2003, pp. 10–15). Placed after the letter and the poem, it contains chiefly geographical and chorographical information, a choice which the chronicler justifies by mentioning that “the country of the Poles is far from the routes of the travelers² and known to few, apart from persons crossing to Russia for the purposes of the trade” (*Gesta principum Polonorum*, 2003, p. 11).³ Robert Jan Kras describes this passage as a “geographical digression” and considers that it resembles the description of the world in Sallust's *Bel-lum Jugurthinum* (Kras, 2002, p. 30). As noticed for instance by Dariusz Rott (1995, p. 71), the geographical description given in the chronicle's prologue can be divided into three parts. It starts with the description of Poland's location and borders, which is followed by a short but detailed description of the “Slavonian land” (*terra Sclavonica*):⁴

Igitur terra Sclauonica ad aquilonem hiis regionibus suis partialiter divisivis sive constitutivis existens, a Sarmaticis, qui et Gete vocantur, in Daciam et Saxoniam terminatur, a Tracia autem per Ungariam ab Hunis, qui et Ungari dicuntur, quondam occupatam, descendendo per Carin-

2 Or perhaps pilgrims: the Latin text contains the word *peregrinorum*, which is the genitive plural of *peregrinus* (foreigner, traveler, pilgrim, wanderer).

3 Latin text: “*quia regio Polonorum ab itineribus peregrinorum est remota, et nisi transeuntibus in Rusiam pro mercimonio paucis nota*” (*Gesta principum Polonorum*, 2003, p. 10).

4 On the geographical description of the *terra Sclavonica* by *Gallus Anonymus*, see Kurdyka (2021, pp. 254–256).

thiam in Bauariam diffinitur; ad austrum vero iuxta mare mediterraneum ab Epyro derivando per Dalmatiam, Crouaciam et Hystriam finibus maris Adriatici terminata, ubi Venetia et Aquileia consistit, ab Hytalia sequestratur. (Gesta principum Polonorum, 2003, p. 14)

So the Slavonian land is divided in the north into parts by or made up of these regions, and it runs from the Sarmatians, who are also known as Gets, to Denmark and Saxony, and from Thrace through Hungary, which in past times was occupied by the Huns (who are also called Hungarians), and passing down through Carinthia it ends at Bavaria. Toward the south, starting from Epirus on the Mediterranean Sea it includes Dalmatia, Croatia, and Istria, and ends on shores of the Adriatic Sea, where Venice and Aquileia stand, separating it from Italy. (*Gesta principum Polonorum*, 2003, p. 15)

Finally, the “geographical” part of the prologue ends with an idyllic description of an area mentioned as “this region” (*que regio*). Scholars are divided about the identity of this “region”: some of them consider that this term refers to Poland (Rott, 1995, p. 78; Żmudzki, 2017, pp. 206–207, especially note 166), whereas others argue that it extends to the whole of the Slavic lands (*Gesta principum Polonorum*, 2003, p. 15, notes 4 and 5; Jasiński, 2016, p. 256; Skibiński, 2009, pp. 196–197; Stępień, 2017, p. 265). The placing of this passage just after the delimitation of the *terra Sclavonica* suggests that it might refer to this area, and it is also the case of the following sentences, in which the chronicler expresses his wish to come back to the main object of his narration, namely Poland and its duke:

Sed ne digressionem nimium prolixam fecisse videamur, ad intentionis nostre propositum revertamur. Est autem intencio nostra de Polonia et duce principaliter Boleslao describere eiusque gratia quedam gesta predecessorum digna memoria recitare. (Gesta principum Polonorum, 2003, p. 14)

But lest we seem to be extending our digression excessively, let us return to our first aim and purpose. Our intention is to tell of Poland and in particular about Duke Bolesław, and for his sake to recount some of the deeds of his forebears that are worthy of record. (*Gesta principum Polonorum*, 2003, p. 15)

Although these elements seem to indicate that the *laus terrae* which appears in the prologue of the first book of Gallus Anonymus’ work refers to the whole area described by the chronicler as *terra Sclavonica*, we must underline that Poland belongs of course to this area, and the chronicler even states that “Poland is the northernmost part of Slavonia” (*Gesta principum Polonorum*, 2003, p. 13).⁵ The editors of the Latin-English edition of Gallus Anonymus’ work consider therefore that “the prefatory *laus terrae* confers on Poland an elevated status within the broader context of the Slavic lands” (*Gesta principum Polonorum*, 2003, p. lvii; see also Żmudzki, 2017, pp. 174–175). We will therefore leave the issue of the location of the land described by Gallus Anonymus to focus on the description itself:

Que regio quamvis multum sit nemorosa, auro tamen et argento, pane et carne, pisce et melle satis est copiosa, et in hoc plurimum aliis preferenda, quod cum a tot supradictis gentibus

⁵ Latin text: “Polonia septemtrionalis pars est Sclauonie” (*Gesta principum Polonorum*, 2003, p. 12; Żmudzki, 2017, p. 174). On the meaning of this reference to the North, see Kurdyka (2021, pp. 254, 257).

et christianis et gentilibus sit vallata et a cunctis insimul et a singulis multociens impugnata, nunquam tamen ab ullo fuit penitus subiugata. Patria ubi aer salubris, ager fertilis, silva melliflua, aqua piscosa, milites bellicosi, rustici laboriosi, equi durabiles, boves arabiles, vacce lactose, oves lanose. (*Gesta principum Polonorum*, 2003, p. 14)

Although this land is thickly forested, yet it has ample resources of gold and silver, bread and meat, fish and honey; but in one respect it is especially to be preferred to all others, for in spite of being surrounded by all the many aforementioned peoples, Christian and pagan alike, and frequently attacked by all and sundry, it has never been completely subjugated by anyone. A land where the air is healthy, the fields fertile, the woods full of honey, the water abounding in fish, the warriors warlike, the peasants hardworking, the horses hardy, the oxen strong at plowing, the cows give abundant milk and the sheep abundant wool. (*Gesta principum Polonorum*, 2003, p. 15)

As already noticed by scholars, the description proposed by *Gallus Anonymus* does not reflect the reality nor provide concrete information, but is a case of *laus terrae* (*Gesta principum Polonorum*, 2003, p. 15, note 5). A quick glance at this text shows clearly that the land it describes looks almost like a paradise on earth. Indeed, the editors of the Latin-English edition of *Gallus Anonymus'* work connect this description with the biblical topic of the Promised Land and consider that there are some similitudes between this description and the description of the Promised Land in the Bible (*Gesta principum Polonorum*, 2003, p. 15, note 5) but the example they give (Exodus 3:8) is rather laconic and differs greatly from the *laus terrae* composed by the anonymous chronicler.

In his praise, *Gallus Anonymus* presents the land's numerous positive features and constructs his description around two enumerations, which gives an impression of abundance. The first enumeration concerns the elements which are said to be plenty in the described area: after a mention that the land has great forests, the other elements are arranged in three pairs, namely gold and silver, bread and meat, fish and honey. The second enumeration describes the elements which can be found in the land and their characteristics: this enumeration consists of ten items – air, fields, woods, water, soldiers, peasants, horses, oxen, cows, and sheep – which are accompanied by adjectives forming rhyming pairs. The rhyming pairs and the lyrical character of this passage have been noticed by scholars (Jasiński, 2016, p. 256; Rott, 1995, pp. 76–77; Stępień, 2017, pp. 266–269), and the Polish philologist Piotr Stępień even considers that it could be an attempt to imitate Horace's sapphic stanzas (Stępień, 2017, pp. 265–272). The adjectives associated with the enumerated items give a positive yet conventional vision: the air is healthy, the land is fertile, the forests are flowing with honey, the water is full of fish, the soldiers are fierce, the peasants are hard-working, the horses are strong, the oxen are able to plow, the cows are full of milk, and the sheep have thick wool.

It is worth noting that both enumerations mention elements of the natural world and the world of agriculture (domestic animals, agricultural products, such as bread), whereas the second one also mentions two groups of inhabitants, namely the soldiers and

the peasants. This variety, which led Paweł Żmudzki to refer to this passage as answers to “a questionnaire concerning different aspects of the country” (Żmudzki, 2017, p. 207), contributes to creating an ideal image of the described land, where everything is perfect and nothing is lacking. This idyllic vision is obtained through the use of literary tools, such as stylistic figures, rhymes, poetic meters, and conventions of representation sometimes linked to the motif of the *locus amoenus*, such as the positive description of woods. However, the chronicler’s description differs from the antique depictions of the *locus amoenus*, as it concerns a much wider area and does not limit itself to the praise of nature, but also includes people and domestic animals. Moreover, *Gallus Anonymus*’ description does not contain any direct esthetic appreciation of the land and focuses chiefly on its resources.

The Praise of Bohemia in Cosmas of Prague’s *Chronica Boemorum*

Just like the chronicle of *Gallus Anonymus*, Cosmas of Prague’s *Chronica Boemorum* is divided into three books. The first one starts with the mention of the story of the Tower of Babel and relates the oldest history of the Czechs and their rulers until the death of Duke Jaromír in 1038. The second book describes the period from the beginning of Břetislav I’s reign to King Vratislav’s death in 1092, and the last one – until the beginning of the reign of Soběslav I in 1125. The description of Bohemia in Cosmas of Prague’s *Chronica Boemorum* appears in the second chapter of the first book of the Chronicle. It follows the location of *Germania*, which starts in the first chapter with the description composed by Paul the Deacon at the beginning of his *Historia Langobardorum* (*Pauli Historia Langobardorum*, 1878) and reused by Regino of Prüm to characterize Scythia in his chronicle (*Reginonis abbatis Prumiensis Chronicon cum continuatione Treverensi*, 1890, p. 132). This passage was thus borrowed from Regino’s Chronicle, a work which was rather frequently used by Cosmas (see Třeštík, 1960). Elements of location of *Germania* also appear in the second chapter of the first book of Cosmas’ Chronicle: according to the Czech scholar Dušan Třeštík, the first sentence of this chapter, which concerns the division of the world into three continents, could have been borrowed from Sallust’s *Bellum Jugurthinum* (Třeštík, 1960, p. 567, note 17).⁶ Cosmas’ description of Bohemia precedes the description of the way of life of the pagan Czechs, which appears at the beginning of the third chapter and is largely inspired by the picture of the customs of the Scythians compiled by Regino of Prüm (*Reginonis abbatis Prumiensis Chronicon cum continuatione Treverensi*, 1890, p. 132) from excerpts of Justin’s *Epitome historiarum Trogi Pompeii* (Marcus Iulianus Iustinus, 1886). The elements concerning the vision of the Bohemian lands first appear in the geographical description of Bohemia:

⁶ On the use of Sallust’s works by Cosmas of Prague, see Kras (2002, pp. 8, 13, 20–22, 24–26, 29–30) and Švanda (2009, pp. 333–335).

Huius terre superficiem tunc temporis vaste tenebant solitudines nemorum sine habitatore hominum; nimis tamen sonore erant examinibus apum et diversarum modulationibus volucrum. Fere silvarum innumere ceu maris harene vel quot sunt stelle in ethere nec ab ullo perterritae errabant per devia terre, et bestiarum gregibus vix sufficebat tellus. Ad numerum locustarum estate per arva saltantium vix poterant equipare armenta iumentorum. Aque illic nimis perspicue et ad humanos usus sane, similiter et pisces suaves et ad comedendum salubres. Mira res, et unde perpendere potes, quam in alto aere hec pendeat regio, cum nulla peregrina hanc influat aqua, sed quotquot amnes, parvi et inmanes ex diversis montibus orti, a maiori aqua que dicitur Labe recepti usque aquilonale fluunt in mare. (Cosmas Pragensis, 2020, p. 10)

In those times, a vast wilderness of forests without human habitation covered the surface of this land; yet it greatly resounded with the buzzing of swarms of bees and the songs of various birds. The beasts of the forest, as countless as the grains of sand of the sea or the stars in the sky, wandered through remote lands without being frightened; the land barely sufficed for the flocks of animals. The beasts of burden could almost equal the number of locusts hopping through the fields during the summer. There, the waters were very limpid and wholesome for human use, and likewise the fish were suitable for eating and delicious. What is a wonder – and you can reckon from it how high this region is located – is that no outside river flows into this region, but as many small and mighty streams that spring from various mountains run into a larger water by the name of Labe and flow into the northern sea. (Cosmas Pragensis, 2020, p. 11)

Positive elements of the description of Bohemia can also be noticed in the speech ascribed to *Bohemus* (in Czech: Čech), the legendary ancestor of the Czechs, given at the time of their settlement in Bohemia:

Hec est illa, hec est illa terra, quam sepe me vobis promississe memini, terra obnoxia nemini, feris et volatilibus referta, nectare mellis et lactis humida, et, ut ipsi perspiciatis, ad habitandum aere iocunda. Aque ex omni parte copiose et ultra modum piscose. Hic vobis nihil deerit, quia nullus vobis oberit. Sed cum hec talis, tam pulchra ac tanta regio in manibus vestris sit, cogitate, aptum terre nomen quod sit. (Cosmas Pragensis, 2020, p. 12)

This is it; this is the land that I remember having often promised to you! It belongs to nobody, abounds with game and birds, drips with nectar, milk and honey,⁷ and as you have seen for yourself, its air is pleasant for living. The waters are copious everywhere and full of fish. Here you will lack nothing, for nobody will harm you. But now that you have such a beautiful and vast land in your hands, think of an apt name for it. (Cosmas Pragensis, 2020, p. 13)

The analysis of those two passages shows clearly that the description of Bohemia at the time of the arrival of the first settlers is idealized. Like *Gallus Anonymus*, Cosmas underlines the abundance of resources of the land he describes by using two enumerations: the first one appears in the description of Bohemia and concerns the “beasts of the forests” (*fere silvarum*), the “beasts of burden” (*iumentum*), waters and fish. The enumeration

⁷ Or rather “with the nectar of milk and honey”; a Czech translation proposes “*sladkým medem a mlékem*” (with sweet honey and milk) (“*Kosmův Letopis český*”, 1874, p. 5).

of these four items takes no less than three sentences, since the chronicler gives some information about each of them. The second enumeration can be found in the words ascribed to *Bohemus* and concerns the land, which, according to Cosmas, “abounds with game and birds” (*feris et volatilibus referta*), “drips with nectar, milk and honey” (*nectare mellis et lactis humida*) and is also “pleasant for living” because of its air (*ad habitandum aere iocunda*). The next sentence concerns the quality of waters, which are “copious everywhere and full of fish” (*Aque ex omni parte copiose, et ultra modum piscose*). In the first sentence of the second enumeration, we can see that some of the items come in pairs, a feature which was already noticed in the work of *Gallus Anonymus*, although none of the pairs created by the two authors are identical.

Enumerations are not the only technique used by Cosmas of Prague to suggest that Bohemia is abundant in natural resources. Indeed, in the geographical description of this country the chronicler uses comparisons to underline the very high number of wild animals as well as beasts of burden: the former are compared to “the grains of sand of the sea” (*maris harene*) and “the stars in the sky” (*stelle in ethere*), whereas the latter – to “locusts hopping through the fields during the summer” (*Ad numerum locustarum estate per arva saltancium*). These comparisons are most probably borrowed from the Bible⁸ and aim to present animals in Bohemia as being so numerous that they cannot be counted, which is also pinpointed by the use of the adjective *innumere* (countless) in the case of wild animals.

Finally, a third way of describing Bohemia’s abundance of resources also appears in the words ascribed to *Bohemus*: it concerns the adjectives used to describe Bohemia, which is referred to as *terra* (land), as well as its waters. The first adjective concerning Bohemia’s land is *referta* (full of), and it applies to wild animals and birds; its etymology, which derives from the verb *farcio* (to stuff), suggests a great quantity. The second one, *humida* (moist), concerns honey and milk; the use of this adjective gives the impression that those resources are so abundant that they fall on the ground, which cannot absorb them all and is soaked with the two liquid animal products. The presence of honey resembles to some extent the expression *silva melliflua* (woods full of honey) used by *Gallus Anonymus*, but this similitude results rather from the use of the same motif, namely the representation of the forest as being rich in bees and honey. Moreover, this similitude is only partial since, unlike *Gallus Anonymus*, Cosmas associates milk with honey, but the source of this pair is hard to determine: it appears in the Old Testament (for instance Exodus 3:8 or Deuteronomy 6:3) as well as in Justin’s work,⁹ and both of them were of course known to the Prague chronicler. The adjectives he uses to describe Czech waters are *copiose* (copious, plentiful, abundant) and *piscose* (full of fish); the second adjective also appears in *Gallus Anonymus’* work, but the use of the adjective *piscosus* to describe a lake (*lacus*)

8 For the sand, see for instance Judges 7:12, 1 Kings 4:20, 1 Kings 5:9; for the stars, see Deuteronomy 1:10; for the locusts/grasshoppers, see Judges 6:5 or 7:12.

9 Marcus Iunianus Iustinus (1886, p. 16): “*Lacte et melle vescuntur.*”

or waters, usually in plural (*aquae*), is not uncommon in Classical and Medieval Latin. Moreover, the adjective *piscose* follows the construction *ultra modum* (beyond measure),¹⁰ which underlines clearly that Czech waters were almost exceedingly populated by fish. This statement resembles the affirmation that “the land barely sufficed for the flocks of animals”, since in both cases the information aims to imply that the number of animals in Bohemia was almost too large, thus stressing the richness of the country.

Besides quantity, Cosmas of Prague also emphasizes the quality of Bohemia’s natural resources: in the first passage, the waters are thus described as “very limpid and wholesome for human use” (*perspicue et ad humanos usus sane*), whereas the fish are said to be “suitable for eating and delicious” (*suaves et ad comedendum salubres*). In the words ascribed to *Bohemus*, Bohemia, which is referred to as *hec regio*, is presented as “beautiful and vast” (*tam pulchra ac tanta*); the adjective *tanta* underlines the significant size of this land and is thus another reference to abundance, whereas the use of the adjective *pulchra* (beautiful) is of course an esthetic appreciation which contributes to creating a sentimental link between the Czechs and their new lands. This emotional link appears even more clearly a few lines below, when *Bohemus* kisses the ground before addressing directly the land:

Tunc senior motus sociorum augurio, cepit terram osculari pre gaudio gaudens eam ex suo nomine nuncupari; et surgens ac utrasque palmas tendens ad sydera sic orsus est loqui: „Salve, terra fatalis, mille votis quesita nobis, olim diluvii tempore viduata homine, nunc quasi monimenta hominum nos conserva incolomes et multiplices nostram sobolem a progenie in progenies.” (Cosmas Pragensis, 2020, p. 14)

Then the joyous elder, moved by his companions’ divination, went to kiss the land, overcome with joy that it was to be called by his name. Arising, he stretched both his hands towards the sky and began to speak: “Hail, destined land, sought by us through countless prayers, empty of people since the time of the Flood, keep us unhurt and multiply our offspring from generation to generation as memorials of mankind.” (Cosmas Pragensis, 2020, p. 15)

The description of Bohemia in Cosmas of Prague’s *Chronica Boemorum* is thus very positive as the chronicler underlines the land’s abundance of various natural resources. Its description includes numerous similarities with the one proposed by *Gallus Anonymus*, although Cosmas’ text focuses on the land at the arrival of the first settlers, whereas the idealized image constructed by the anonymous chronicler is supposed to describe the land at the time of redaction of his work. Despite some references to agriculture, such as the abundance of beasts of burden, milk, and honey, the description of the Czech chronicler focuses chiefly on the wilderness: although still uncultivated, Bohemia is presented as a very rich and promising land, which will ensure the prosperity of the Czechs. The image of the wild but hospitable land needs to be read in conjunction with the first part of the chronicle’s next chapter, which concerns the ancient Czechs’ way of life and

10 Those two words do not appear in the English translation proposed by J. M. Bák and P. Rychterová (Cosmas Pragensis, 2020, p. 13) but they are present in another English translation (Cosmas of Prague, 2009, p. 36).

relates that they originally lived in a simple manner but were putting resources in common and had no conflicts (Cosmas Pragensis, 2020, pp. 14–17). In the following part of the third chapter of the first book of his Chronicle, Cosmas adds that thanks to the natural resources of the land, the inhabitants became wealthy, and that prosperity causes troubles, which led the Czechs to choose judges for themselves (Cosmas Pragensis, 2020, pp. 16–17). The association of those elements contributes to presenting ancient Bohemia as a kind of lost paradise. The praise of the land by Cosmas of Prague is also more precise about the described area's inner geography than the *laus terrae* by Gallus Anonymus, as the Czech chronicler writes that Bohemia is surrounded by mountains and has only one large river. This description has some analogies with the description of the Vale of Tempe, which, according to Curtius, was so popular in antique literature that it gave its name to a specific type of *locus amoenus*, namely “a cool, wooded valley between two steep slopes” (Curtius, 1948, pp. 203–204). The analysis of the motifs which inspired Cosmas and of the particular textual elements he borrowed suggests strongly the influence of both the Bible and Classical authors.

Scythia in the *Gesta Hungarorum* of the Anonymous Notary

The motifs of the homeland as an uncultivated but rich area and of the life of the ancestors as being simple and harmonious also appear in the first chapter of the *Gesta Hungarorum* of the anonymous notary. Unlike the chronicle of Gallus Anonymus and Cosmas of Prague's *Chronica Boemorum*, the only known copy of this work is not divided into books but into chapters, which have their own titles and follow a short dedicatory letter. The 57 chapters relate the history of the Hungarians from their legendary origins until their Christianization under the rule of King Stephen I at the turn of the eleventh century. However, the main topic is the conquest of the Carpathian Basin by the Hungarians, and this event is described in great detail. The first chapter of the *Gesta Hungarorum* of the anonymous notary contains chiefly a description of Scythia, which is said to be the original homeland of the Hungarians, and of the way of life of its inhabitants as well as some information about their past. The main sources of this description – which might have also appeared (although in a different form) in the lost *Gesta Hungarorum* (Deér, 1930, pp. 243–263) – are the already mentioned description of Scythia in Regino of Prüm's work and the *Exordia Scythica*, a short historical work about the Scythians composed in the seventh or eighth century (“Exordia Scythica”, 1890, pp. 308–322; Thoroczkay, 1999, pp. 110–111). Like the passages concerning Scythia and the Scythians in the work of the abbot of Prüm, the *Exordia Scythica* is composed chiefly from excerpts of Justin's *Epitome historiarum Trogi Pompeii* (“Exordia Scythica”, 1890, pp. 308–322).

The description of Scythia in the *Gesta Hungarorum* of the anonymous notary appears at the beginning of the first chapter, which is entitled *De Scithia* (On Scythia):

Scythia igitur maxima terra est, que Dentumoger dicitur, versus orientem, finis cuius ab aquilonali parte extenditur usque ad Nigrum Pontum. A tergo autem habet flumen, quod dicitur Thanais, cum paludibus magnis, ubi ultra modum habundanter inveniuntur zobolini ita, quod non solum nobiles et ignobiles vestiuntur inde, verum etiam bubulci et subbulci ac opiliones sua decorant vestimenta in terra illa. Nam ibi habundat aurum et argentum et inveniuntur in fluminibus terre illius preciosi lapides et gemme. ("Anonymi Bele regis notarii Gesta Hungarorum", 2010, pp. 4, 6)

Scythia is then a very great land, called Dentumoger, over towards the east, the end of which reaches from the north to the Black Sea. On the far side, it has a river with great marshes, called the Don, where sables can be found in such extraordinary abundance that in that land not only nobles and commoners dress in them but also with which even ox-herds, swine-herds and shepherds adorn their raiment. Gold and silver abound there and in the rivers of this land precious stones and gems are found. ("Anonymi Bele regis notarii Gesta Hungarorum", 2010, pp. 5, 7)

After the geographical description and some brief information about the history of the Scythians, the anonymous notary describes their way of life:

Non enim habebant domos artificio paratas, sed tantum tentoria de filtro parata. Carnes et pisces et lac et mel manducabant et pigmenta multa habebant. Vestiti enim erant de pellibus zobolorum et aliarum ferarum. Aurum et argentum et gemmas habebant sicut lapides, quia in fluminibus eiusdem terre inveniebantur. Non concupiscebant aliena, quia omnes divites erant, habentes animalia multa et victualia sufficienter. ("Anonymi Bele regis notarii Gesta Hungarorum", 2010, p. 8)

And they did not have homes built by craft but rather tents made of felt. They ate meat and fish and milk and honey and they had much spice. And their clothes were of the pelts of sables and other wild beasts. They held gold, silver and gems as common as stones, which they found in the rivers of this land. They desired no one else's goods, for they were all rich, having many animals and sufficient victuals. ("Anonymi Bele regis notarii Gesta Hungarorum", 2010, p. 9)

The analysis of those two passages shows that the anonymous author sees Scythia as abundant in wild animals, especially sables, in gold, silver, precious stones as well as in spices (*pigmenta*). The main device suggesting abundance is – as in *Gallus Anonymus'* work and in the *Chronica Boemorum* – the use of enumerations, but their role is more limited than in the other two works. We can notice one list of all the different Scythian social categories who use sable skins for their clothes, three enumerations concerning natural resources, and one inventory of the foods consumed by the Scythians, but those enumerations are rather short: the longest one, which is also the first, contains five items.

The list of Scythian social categories who use sable skins aims to illustrate the multitude of the sables; this information comes from the mention in Justin's work about the use of animal hides to make garments (*Lanae his usus ac vestium ignotus [...], pellibus tamen ferinis ac murinis utuntur*). The enumeration lists five groups of people in Scythian society, namely nobles (*nobiles*), commoners (*ignobiles*), ox-herds (*bubulci*), swine-herds (*subulci*), and shepherds (*opiliones*); it starts with the highest ranked social groups and ends with the lowest ranked ones, i.e. herders. The mention that all those groups, including the more modest, are able to use, even if only to some extent, sable skins suggests that this resource, which

was seen as a luxury good in the Middle Ages, is so abundant that everyone has access to it, and this impression of abundance is also conveyed by the use of the expression *ultra modum* (beyond measure).

The first two enumerations of natural resources appear in the same sentences and concern precious metals and stones; each enumeration features only one pair of elements, namely “gold and silver” (*aurum et argentum*) and “precious stones and gems” (*preciosi lapides et gemme*). The first pair, “gold and silver”, can also be found in the works of *Gallus Anonymus*, but the association of those elements is quite frequent (it also appears in Justin’s work, as well as in numerous other texts, such as the Bible).¹¹ In the last enumeration containing precious metals and stones, gold and silver appear alongside gems (*aurum et argentum et gemmas habebant sicut lapides*). This enumeration and the comparison to stones (*sicut lapides*) are clearly borrowed from the version of the *Exordia Scythica* preserved in the *Codex Bambergensis*.¹² The comparison of precious and rare minerals to something very common, such as stones – like the use of the verb (*h*)*abundo* (to abound) to introduce the first mention of gold and silver – functions in a similar way to the mention of the social categories which can wear sable skins: they both aim to underline the wealth of Scythia by stating that some things which are normally considered rare and precious are common in this land.

The last enumeration concerns the foods and drinks consumed by the Scythians and features four items, namely meat, fish, milk, and honey (*Carnes et pisces et lac et mel manducabant*). Some of them appear also in *Gallus Anonymus*’ chronicle, and the pair “milk and honey” can also be found in the *Chronica Boemorum*, but the source of this pair in the *Gesta Hungarorum* of the anonymous notary is probably Justin’s work (Marcus Iunianus Iustinus, 1886, p. 16). The pair “milk and honey” appears in both the *Exordia Scythica* and Regino of Prüm’s *Chronicon*, whereas meat and fish in the enumeration might come from the mention of the Scythians’ custom of hunting and fishing in Regino of Prüm’s work.¹³

The sentence featuring a list of foods and drinks also provides information that the Scythians had “much spice” (*et pigmenta multa habebant*). This mention – which obviously comes from the *Exordia Scythica* and is closer to the version contained in the *Codex Bambergensis*¹⁴ – aims to show that, as in the case of the sables and precious metals and stones, Scythia has great quantities of goods (as illustrated by the use of the word *multa*) which are usually considered to be precious and rare.

The different constructions elaborated by the anonymous notary in his passages about Scythia and Scythians contribute to presenting this land as very rich, since it has

11 See for instance 2 Kings 20:13, where the pair gold-silver is associated with spices.

12 “*Exordia Scythica*” (1890, p. 319), *Codex Bambergensis*: “*aurum et argentum et gemmas sicut lapides habebant*”. About the manuscripts containing the *Exordia Scythica*, see “*Exordia Scythica*” (1890, pp. 308–309).

13 *Reginonis abbatis Prumiensis Chronicon cum continuatione Treverensi* (1890, p. 132): “*venationum et piscationum exercitiis inserviunt*”.

14 “*Exordia Scythica*” (1890, p. 319); *Codex Laurentianus*: “*et pigmentarum inmensitas apud eos abundabilis*”; *Codex Bambergensis*: “*aurum et argentum et gemmas sicut lapides habebant et pigmenta multa*”. On this point, see also Déri (1989, pp. 223–236).

an abundance of things that tend to be seen as luxury goods, such as sable skins, gold, silver, precious stones, gems, and spices. However, the resources of this land are not unlimited: the chronicler states that after some time, the Scythian population grew so much that the land could not feed nor contain all the people ("Anonymi Bele regis notarii *Gesta Hungarorum*", 2010, pp. 10–11, 16–17). As noted by Martyn Rady and László Veszprémy, the motif of overpopulation is often used in medieval sources to explain migration ("Anonymi Bele regis notarii *Gesta Hungarorum*", 2010, p. 11, note 2),¹⁵ but the use of what they consider to be "a commonplace" ("Anonymi Bele regis notarii *Gesta Hungarorum*", 2010, p. 11, note 2) does not really tarnish the image of Scythia as a rich country.

The analysis of the description of Scythia written by the anonymous notary shows that its main inspiration was clearly the *Exordia Scythica* (especially the passage of this text which mentions Scythia's abundance of gold, silver, precious stones, gems, and spices and does not appear in Justin's work). It differs significantly from the praises of the land written by *Gallus Anonymus* and by Cosmas of Prague: it focuses on luxury goods and does not give much attention to other natural elements, except for the marshes along the Don and a mention of the other rivers of Scythia, which, however, appear (respectively) in the context of the sables and the precious metals and stones. On the other hand, the elements concerning the inhabitants and their customs have some analogies with Cosmas' Chronicle. Those similitudes can be explained by the fact that both works used the same source, namely Regino of Prüm's Chronicle, and employed its information on Scythians to fulfill the same goal – to show that the homeland's first inhabitants led a simple but virtuous life.

Conclusion

The analysis of the "praises of the land" in the three oldest Central European historiographic monuments shows clearly their respective specificity, but also a certain proximity between Cosmas of Prague's *Chronica Boemorum* and the *Gesta Hungarorum* of the anonymous notary. The descriptions proposed by both works concern the beginnings of the national history, namely the legendary settlement of the Czechs in Bohemia and the "Scythian episode" of the Hungarian past, and they appear before a passage concerning the customs of the first inhabitants, i.e. the ancient Czechs and the Scythians. We must also add that those "ethnographic" descriptions come from the same source, i.e. Justin's *Epitome historiarum Trogi Pompeii*, whose text was transmitted to Cosmas and to the anonymous notary through Regino of Prüm's *Chronicon* as well as, in the case of the *Gesta Hungarorum* of the anonymous notary, through the *Exordia Scythica*. Despite

15 M. Rady and L. Veszprémy quote the case of Paul the Deacon's *Historia Langobardorum*; see *Pauli Historia Langobardorum* (1878, pp. 52–53).

the existence of some differences, both descriptions present the homeland as wild and uncultivated but also rich in natural resources. Unlike these two texts, the *laus terrae* which appears in the work of *Gallus Anonymus* does not bear clear traces of the use of other written sources; it also differs from its counterparts as it depicts the homeland (be it Poland or the entire Slavic world) at the time of redaction of the chronicle and presents it as a rich and cultivated area.

In spite of those differences, the praises of the homeland in the work of *Gallus Anonymus*, in Cosmas of Prague's *Chronica Boemorum*, and in the *Gesta Hungarorum* of the anonymous notary also have some important analogies. Indeed, those three works give a very similar description of the homeland, which is presented as a wealthy land that abounds in various natural resources, whose qualities are also underlined. The resources which are mentioned and the qualities ascribed to them are often similar and sometimes even identical. The existence of those analogies is not surprising since the three works are clearly influenced by the same literary motifs, and two of those works, namely Cosmas of Prague's *Chronica Boemorum* and the *Gesta Hungarorum* of the anonymous notary, use the same literary constructions, which they borrow from their aforementioned sources but also from the Bible (especially from the Old Testament). The choice of the three chroniclers to present the homeland as a *locus amoenus* was of course related to their intention to emphasize the position of the country whose past they related as well as the power of the current and previous rulers of this territory.

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***Laus Terrae*. Pochwała ojczyzny w najstarszych środkowoeuropejskich zabytkach historiograficznych**

Abstrakt

Termin *laus terrae* (pochwała ziemi) oznacza bardzo pozytywny opis ojczyzny, który pojawia się zazwyczaj na początku średniowiecznych dzieł historiograficznych. W artykule dokonano analizy kompozycji tego typu tekstów w najstarszych obszernych kronikach polskich, czeskich i węgierskich. W omawianych utworach odnotowuje się liczne podobieństwa w opisie ojczyzny ukazanej jako żyzna kraina obfitująca w rozmaite zasoby, których walory podkreślane są w tekstach w podobny sposób. Istnienie tych analogii nie dziwi, gdyż autorzy analizowanych dzieł pozostawali pod wpływem tych samych motywów literackich. Decyzja podjęta przez trzech kronikarzy, by ojczyznę ukazać jako *locus amoenus* (miejsce przyjemne) wiązała się z chęcią podkreślenia pozycji państwa, którego przeszłość relacjonowali, oraz potęgi obecnych i dawnych władców tych terytoriów.

Słowa kluczowe: *laus terrae*; Polska; Czechy; Węgry; średniowiecze; historiografia; ojczyzna

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